

Two species new to Ethiopia

Per Ole Syvertsen

On mentionne ici la présence de deux espèces d'oiseaux encore jamais enregistrées en Éthiopie: une Sterne caugek *Sterna sandvicensis*, a été observée au lake Ziway, entre Addis Abeba et Awasa, le 15 avril 1993. Par ailleurs, deux individus appartenant soit à l'espèce Petit coucou *Cuculus poliocephalus*, soit à l'espèce Coucou malgache *C. rochii* ont été observés entre Tedim et Yabello, Borana, le 25 avril 1993.

During fieldwork in Ethiopia in 1990–1995, I made numerous ornithological observations, principally in the Rift Valley and Borana in the south of the country. Details of two species previously unrecorded from the country^{3,13} are presented here.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

While travelling between Addis Ababa and Awasa on 15 April 1993 I stopped to check Lake Ziway from an easy access point at the south end of Ziway town (c07°55'N 38°44'E). Among a loose association of c350 gulls and terns, I noticed an adult Sandwich Tern in summer plumage. The black bill with a distinct yellow tip, the black cap and crested appearance of an otherwise nearly all grey-white tern made the identification of this common and familiar European species straightforward. Detailed field notes were not taken, and no other plumage or bare part details were recorded. No call was noted. Also present were c10 Gull-billed *Gelochelidon niloticus*, c80 Whiskered *Chlidonias hybridus* and c50 White-winged Black Terns *C. leucopterus*, and c200 Grey-headed *Larus cirrocephalus* and one adult Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*. The perched Sandwich Tern was observed through 10x40 binoculars, at a distance of 50–100 m, and was present throughout my brief stay in the area, from 11.50–12.20 hrs.

Lake Ziway is a relatively large (almost 29 km long and 20 km wide) freshwater lake at an altitude of 1,636 m principally bordered by swamp¹⁰. The area where the Sandwich Tern was seen consists of flooded swamp with more open vegetation than the papyrus beds that dominate much of the lake shore. The record has previously been mentioned in Tilahun *et al*¹⁰ and Syvertsen¹¹, and the species was included in a recent list of Ethiopian birds⁵ on the basis of this sighting.

Sandwich Tern commonly winters on West and southern African coasts, but is less widespread in East Africa and the Red Sea, and is rare inland in Africa¹⁴. In Kenya it was first recorded in 1973 and has been near-annual since 1976, with all records in August–

April with the exception of one bird on 2 June⁸. The first inland Kenyan record was one at Lake Baringo on 2–6 November 1991¹². In Somalia, the species is rare with 12 coastal records since 1979, all in January and March–May¹. It is rare in Sudan where it has occurred once inland (two birds in Khartoum in May 1952)^{6,9}. Sandwich Tern has also been recorded as a vagrant in land-locked Mali³.

Asian Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* or Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *C. rochii*

On 25 April 1993, I drove a track leading to the village of Tedim north of Yabello in Borana. In late morning I noticed a cuckoo of the Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* / African Cuckoo *C. gularis* type that immediately struck me as being unusually small. Observed through 10x40 binoculars at a distance of 30–50 m, the bird's structure and plumage appeared similar to that of the two larger *Cuculus* species, but it was much smaller. The body length was comparable to that of a Black Cuckoo *C. clamorosus* or White-crowned Starling *Spreo albicapillus*, although direct size comparison with other species was impossible. There was no yellow at the base of the bill. It moved through the upper level of the vegetation and disappeared to the north. No call was heard. Amazingly, shortly afterwards I came across a second bird of the same type.

Both individuals were seen along the track before Tedim, at c05°00–05'N 38°10'E. The track leaves the tarmac in a westerly direction c13.5 km north of the road barrier at Yabello, and Tedim is reached after c10 km. The terrain is undulating and the vegetation is largely semi-arid *Acacia* savannah, heavily grazed by livestock in some places. The altitude is c1,500–1,650 m.

In East Africa, Asian Lesser Cuckoo occurs in east Kenya and east Tanzania in November–April and is often numerous on migration in coastal East Africa in March–April^{2,8}. There are no spring records in Somalia, although

two November occurrences have been reported in the literature¹. Asian Lesser Cuckoo appears to principally reach Africa south of Tanzania, and there is some indication that it departs in spring via the same route⁴. There are no records in the Middle East⁷ up until the end of 1998 at least (GM Kirwan pers. comm.). The Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo is a non-breeding visitor to western East Africa including Uganda, principally in April–September^{2,8}. It has not been recorded in Somalia¹. Neither species is known from Sudan or Djibouti^{3,9}.

Based on date, the two birds seen in Borana in April 1993 could have been either Asian Lesser Cuckoo on spring migration or Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo in their non-breeding range. In either case the record appears to have involved vagrants: either Asian Lesser Cuckoos far to the north-west of their normal migration route, or Madagascar Lesser Cuckoos which had wandered further north than the species has previously been recorded. ♀

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